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PART III

BODIN'S *METHODUS* IN ENGLAND BEFORE 1625

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Because Jean Bodin's *Methodus ad facilem historiarum cognitionem* is one of the most significant of the many Renaissance treatises on the art of reading and writing history,¹ the student of Tudor historiography will sooner or later desire to know what use was made of it in England. This note is meant to satisfy that desire.

Strikingly enough, there appear to be no references to the *Methodus* in England before about 1580. The rather sudden interest of English writers in a work to which they had been inattentive for over fourteen years may be explained in several ways. It may be a part of a growing interest in historical studies. The popularity of Bodin's *Republique*² (1st ed. 1576) may have sent readers to the author's earlier work. A perhaps still more likely explanation is Bodin's visit to England in 1579-81. His movements have never been accurately traced,³ but it is believed that he accompanied the Duke of Anjou on both of the latter's trips to the court of Elizabeth, August 1579 and November 1581. Gabriel

¹ After its first appearance in 1566, the *Methodus* was reprinted in 1572, 83, 95, 99, 1607, 10, and 50; and it occupied the position of honor in both editions (1577 and 1579) of that popular collection of essays on history, the *Artis historicae penus*. It is, moreover, the only representative of its *genre* to have received serious critical study in modern times. The best studies are by John L. Brown, *The Methodus ad Facilem Historiarum Cognitionem of Jean Bodin: A Critical Study* (Washington, D. C., 1939), and A. Garosci, *Jean Bodin* (Milano, 1934), Cap. 3.

² "You can not stepp into a schollars studye but (ten to one) you shall likely find open ether Bodin de Republica . . ." (c. 1580), *Letterbook of Gabriel Harvey*, ed. E. J. L. Scott, Camden Soc. Publ., New Series (London, 1884), XXXIII, 79.

³ The State Papers and correspondence of the time offer but little help. Most of the evidence is summarized by Summerfield Baldwin, "Jean Bodin and the League," *The Cath. Hist. Rev.*, XXIII (1937-8), 160-184.

Bodin apparently witnessed the execution of Edmund Campion in December 1581, and thereafter advised the Queen and her nobles against the use of violent means to control religious factions. He was in England on February 19, 1581, in the company of the Duke's agent, Pierre Claussée, Sieur de Marchaumont, and on February 27, Bernardino de Mendoza, the Spanish ambassador, describes him as Anjou's councillor and secretary.



Harvey is supposed to have met Bodin at the University of Cambridge in 1579,⁴ and Dr. John Dee notes on February 23, 1581, that he "made acquayntance with Joannes Bodinus, in the Chambre of Presence at Westminister. . . ."⁵

Whatever the explanation, the *Methodus* had been brought to William Harrison's attention at some time between the first appearance of his *Description of England* in 1577 and its revision in 1587; for among the learned additions to the enlarged version are three references to the *Methodus*. The first two are concerned with the origin of the word Albion and the ways of investigating ancient languages.⁶ The third and more important reference is to Bodin's excursion into numerology.⁷ "There is a certeine period of kingdomes of 430. yeares," Harrison begins confidently, "in which commonlie they suffer some notable alteration." But before he begins to apply this cyclical theory, Harrison feels obliged to appeal to authorities, among them Bodin. Even "Bodinus in his historical method, cap. 6. making a large discourse of the conversions of commonwealths," finally admits the significance of numbers. Of course we Christians, acknowledges Harrison, must attribute alterations of states solely to Divine Providence; but "we may without offense examine how these assertions [about numbers] hold, so long as we use them rather as Indices than causas mutationum." And so he proceeds to play his chronological game from the Creation onward, bending the evidence to suit his needs. His use of the *Methodus* is thus an index to his uncritical piety. He could take from it only what agreed with his preconceptions.

Although Bodin's use of numbers is often equally fanciful, his basic intention was more intelligent than Harrison perceived. He wished to discover some method or order in the diversity of human experience which will justify the reading and writing of history.

⁴ Cf. Sir Sidney Lee, *The French Renaissance in England* (Oxford, 1910), 321. Harvey claims more than once to have been commended by Bodin. Cf. *Harvey's Marginalia*, ed. G. C. Moore Smith (Stratford-Upon-Avon, 1913), pp. 284-85; and *The Works of Thomas Nashe*, ed. R. B. McKerrow (London, 1910) I, 294, III, 116.

⁵ *The Private Diary of Dr. John Dee*, ed. J. O. Halliwell, Camden Soc. Publ. (London, 1842), XIX, 10.

⁶ *The Description of England*, I, 3, 6 in Holinshed's *Chronicles* (London, 1807), I, 6, 23. Cf. *Methodus* (Lugdunensem, 1583), Cap. 9, pp. 371-2 *et passim*.

⁷ *Description*, I, 9 in *Chronicles*, I, 49-50. Cf. *Methodus*, Cap. 6, pp. 223 ff.

Of the four kinds of history, divine, mathematical, natural, and human, only the last is confused and mutable. The student of human history, therefore, needs to orient himself in the midst of uncertainty by finding fixed points of references. Bodin essays to find these points by determining the relation of human with divine history through a study of religions, with mathematical history through a study of numerology, and with natural history through a study of geography and climate.

Elsewhere in the *Chronicles*,⁸ Holinshed himself cites Bodin on the subject of British origins, and his scornful tone aligns him with those who were opposed to skeptical treatments of the Brutus legend or similar material. In fact from 1580 to as late as 1631, Bodin was often attacked along with Polydore Vergil as one of the 'learned clerks' attempting to discredit Geoffrey's account of early British history.⁹ Conversely, Bodin must have encouraged those more enlightened English writers who desired to stand firmly against national prejudice in history-writing.

The *Methodus* was apparently used also by Sidney (1580), Harvey (c. 1580), Thomas Rogers (1585-87), Nashe (1592), Spenser (1594-97), Bolton (c. 1618), and Hobbes (before 1629). Sidney observes in a letter to his brother (October 18, 1580)¹⁰ that "For the method of writing Historie, Boden hath written at large, yow may reade him and gather out of many wordes some matter." No doubt his study of the *Methodus* strengthened Sidney's scorn for the extreme rhetorical conception of history.¹¹ Harvey may have had the *Methodus* in mind when he wrote to Spenser in 1579-80: "You suppose the first age was the goulde age. It is nothing soe. Bodin defendeth the goulde age to flourish nowe. . . ."¹² Thomas Rogers, the theologian, quotes a passage from the *Methodus* (Lugdunum, 1583, cap. vi, p. 258) to illustrate his remark that there

⁸ *Ibid.*, I, 430-431.

⁹ Cf. Stowe's and Howes' prefaces to the former's *Chronicles or Annals of England*, 1580 and 1631. The controversy is surveyed by Edwin Greenlaw, "The Battle of the Books," *Studies in Spenser's Historical Allegory* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1932).

¹⁰ *Works*, ed. Albert Feuillerat (Cambridge University Press, 1923), III, 130.

¹¹ Cf. *Ibid.*, III, 17.

¹² *Letterbook*, *op. cit.*, p. 86. Cf. E. M. Albright, "Spenser's Reasons for Rejecting the Mutability Cantos," *SP*, XXV (1928), pp. 93 ff.

are persons in France, like Knox in Scotland, who wrongly object to women sovereigns.¹³ Nashe, in *Have With You to Saffron-Walden* (1596), borrows eight or nine times from the first half of the *Methodus*, emphasizing Bodin's criticism of credulity. For example: "Bodine wold start up and taxe mee for a miracle-monger, as he taxt Livy, saying that he talkt of nothing else, save how oxen spake, or of the flames that issued out of Scipioes head. . . ." ¹⁴ It has been suggested ¹⁵ that Spenser "in his historical method as well as in his political theory . . . shows points in common with Bodin." There are, however, no specific references to the *Methodus* in Spenser's works. Edmund Bolton, in his *Hypercritica: or a Rule of Judgment, for writing or reading our Historys* (c. 1618), supports a plea for historical truthfulness by an appeal to Bodin. Instead of presenting "Judgements" which "are commonly . . . prejudices," the historian should follow Bodin's advice and compose "nothing else but an Image of truth. . . ." ¹⁶ In the prefatory material to his translation of Thucydides (completed before 1629), Thomas Hobbes expresses opinions remarkably like some of Bodin's. He praises Thucydides' history, for example, because it does not contain didactic digressions, which "being discourses inserted, and not of the contexture of the narration, . . . commend the knowledge of the writer, but not the history itself: the nature whereof is merely narrative." ¹⁷

More extensive use was made of the *Methodus* by Thomas Heywood and Degory Wheare. The former translated the fourth chapter of the *Methodus* as the preface to his English version of Sallust (1608). In this chapter, "De historicorum delectu" (pp. 35-78), Bodin strongly opposes himself to the extreme rhetorical conception

¹³ *The Catholic Doctrine of the Church of England, An Exposition of the Thirty-Nine Articles*, ed. J. J. S. Perowne, Parker Society (Cambridge, 1854), p. 337.

There is a legend to the effect that Elizabeth nicknamed Bodin, "Badin" because of his attitude toward women. Cf. the critical account in Baldwin, *op. cit.*, p. 165.

¹⁴ *Works, op. cit.*, III, 62-63; see also V, 125. Cf. *Methodus*, p. 51.

¹⁵ H. S. V. Jones, *A Spenser Handbook* (New York, 1940), pp. 382-384.

¹⁶ *Critical Essays of the Seventeenth Century*, ed. J. E. Spingarn (Oxford, 1908), I, 91-94.

¹⁷ *The English Works of Thomas Hobbes*, ed. Sir William Molesworth (London, 1843), VIII, vii. Cf. below.

of history.¹⁸ He condemns those historians who interrupt their discourses with feigned orations and eloquent digressions. The best instruction is that which is furnished indirectly by means of a clear, truthful narrative. He disgraced Nero sufficiently who penned his butchery of honest persons. The most admirable historian is not the teller of wonders nor the creator of theatrical scenes, but the man who combines talent, experience in statescraft, and careful research, and who provides the reader with an insight into the offices of public and private government.

The virtues of this chapter may be emphasized by contrasting it with two other foreign essays which were also translated as prefaces by English writers. One of these, the enormously popular *De utilitate legendae historiae* by Simon Grynaeus,¹⁹ sternly warns readers against the enticing examples of vice with which histories abound. Grynaeus explains that the reader's own weak character allows him to follow his inclinations rather than the real lessons of the historical examples, and that historians tend to write what the reader wants instead of what he ought to have. It is not clear whether Grynaeus desires the historian to furnish only moral examples or to report life as it actually is; probably he is more interested in defending history against the charge of licentiousness by shifting some of the responsibility on to the reader than he is in arguing for a more literal transcription of life. Certainly his conception of history as disparate biographical examples is much less advanced than Bodin's. The second of the two essays with which we are concerned appears at the beginning of Thomas Cooper's continuation of Lanquet's *Epitome of Chronicles* (1560). It is

¹⁸ A typical exponent of the rhetorical conception is Pontano, whose underlying argument in the dialogue *Actius* (1507) seems to be this. The object of history, like that of poetry or oratory, is to move, delight, and thereby to teach virtuous living; and since the reader is moved and delighted by a beautiful style, style is important. It is so essential that if the bare facts are not sufficiently moving, delightful, and instructive in themselves, the historian is justified in manipulating them, in supplying extrinsic ornaments, and in inventing probable additions. As late as 1636, Agostino Mascardi, in his *Dell'arte historica*, is still concerned largely with the stylistic features of history-writing.

¹⁹ After its first appearance in 1531, it was commonly printed as a preface to the works of Livy and Justin, as well as independently in the *Artis historicae penus*. Both Lodge's Josephus (1603) and Wilkin's Justin (1606) are prefaced by English versions of it.

Walter Lynne's English version of the preface to the widely read chronicle by Johann Carion and Melancthon. Predominately mediaeval and theological in character, it stresses the infallibility of the Old Testament as an historical source, the value of history in demonstrating the power of divine justice and in providing instructive biographical examples, and the belief that the German nation is the continuator of the Fourth or Roman Monarchy. Professor Lily Bess Campbell, who quotes from this preface, professes to see in it an anticipation of Bodin's theory of the political utility of history.²⁰ Such a judgment, however, does not sufficiently emphasize the difference between the exemplary and Providential type of political instruction presented by Lanquet-Cooper and the essentially analytical and rationalistic type advocated by Bodin. Guicciardini, who is highly praised by Bodin in his fourth chapter, is a political historian of a different kind from any of the Tudor chroniclers. It is fair to conclude that Heywood, by translating a portion of the *Methodus*, supplied English readers with a preface which was superior to most of those available.

Degory Wheare, as the first appointee to the Camden Readership in History at Oxford, might well be expected to have studied the *Methodus*.²¹ He appears to have done so; for his popular guide to historical literature contains eleven references to Bodin. Nine of them are criticisms of individual historians. Paulus Jovius is condemned for his fictions; Josephus and Dion Cassius are commended for writing truthfully from their own experiences; Guicciardini is praised for his careful use of primary sources and his

²⁰ "Those who have written about the history of history have been accustomed to proclaim the work of Jean Bodin as initiating a new conception of history when he asserted that 'En effet, la première utilité de l'histoire est de servir à la politique.' Yet it must be apparent to anyone who has read the English chronicles of such men as Lanquet and Halle, that, long before Bodin, history was serving in English the purpose of political teaching." *The Mirror for Magistrates* (Cambridge University Press, 1938), pp. 50-51.

It will be remembered that Bodin refuted the German claim to the Fourth Monarchy in Chapter VII of the *Methodus*.

²¹ Wheare was appointed Oct. 16, 1622, and one of his first undertakings was the composition of a guide for readers of history, *De ratione et methodo legendi historias* (1623). Future references are to the English translation by Edmund Bohun, *The Method and Order of Reading both Civil and Ecclesiastical Histories* . . . (London, 1698).

interpretation of events; Dionysius Halicarnassus is recommended as the recorder of 'inelegant' as well as illustrious details of early Roman history; and Polybius is approved for his critical treatment of civil and military affairs and for his discussion of history-writing.²²

The foregoing citations reveal Wheare as a conscientious professor determined to present his audience with the best critical opinion of the time. Bodin is consistently used to encourage a taste for truthful, analytical historical narratives. When Wheare attempts to make use of the more speculative or controversial sections of the *Methodus*, however, he is less successful, and consequently exhibits the limitations of his mind. His objections to Chapter VII of the *Methodus*, for example, are wide of the mark because they spring from a misunderstanding of Bodin's criticism of the scheme of the Four Monarchies.²³

The following conclusions appear to be reasonable. The *Methodus* was referred to with sufficient frequency and matter-of-factness to indicate that it was probably read by most serious English students of history between 1580 and 1625. The way it was used emphasizes the considerable difference between the rather mediaeval or uncritical conception of history held by the Tudor chroniclers and the relatively modern opinions of the English humanists. Bodin's more novel speculations do not appear to have appealed to those thinkers of the time who were capable of appreciating them. It is unfortunate, for example, that Bacon was not stirred to elaborate or criticize Bodin's ideas about natural causation. Nevertheless, Bodin almost certainly contributed to the development of the kind of rationalistic, political history-writing of which Bacon was the chief Tudor exponent.²⁴

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²² Wheare, *op. cit.*, pp. 73, 84-6, 92, 98-9, 100, 122, 127, 128-9, 229. Cf. *Methodus*, pp. 52, 55-6, 60, 66, 71, 55, 67-8, 75.

²³ Wheare, *op. cit.*, pp. 30-1; cf. *Methodus*, pp. 198-310.

²⁴ See the present writer's article, "Sir Francis Bacon's Theory of Civil History-writing," *ELH*, VIII (1941), 161-183.